

Israeli arrests of Palestinian journalists soared in 2023

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Palestinian journalists sitting in the courtyard of Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in Deir al-Balah [File: Atia Darwish/Al Jazeera]

New York, January 18 (RHC)--Israel emerged as one of the world's leading jailers of journalists in 2023, according to a report by a press freedom watchdog, with the number of reporters behind bars soaring after the start of the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza.

In its annual snapshot of jailed journalists published on Thursday, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) found that Israel was the joint sixth biggest jailer of journalists in 2023, alongside Iran.

There were 17 Palestinian reporters held in Israeli jails as of December 1, the CPJ said. By comparison, the previous year one Palestinian reporter was held in an Israeli prison, according to the New York-based non-profit group.

“Israel has appeared several times on CPJ’s annual census, but this is the highest number of arrests of Palestinian journalists since CPJ began documenting arrests in 1992 and the first time Israel has ranked among the top six offenders,” read the report.

All those held in Israeli prisons were detained in the occupied West Bank after the Israel-Hamas war began on October 7, when Hamas fighters launched a surprise assault into southern Israel, killing at least 1,139 people, mostly civilians, according to an Al Jazeera tally based on official statistics. Around 240 others were taken captive, according to Israeli authorities.

Israel responded with a devastating bombardment and ground offensive on Gaza. More than 24,600 people have been killed in the Israeli assault, according to Palestinian officials.

In the more than three months since the Gaza war started, violence has soared in towns and cities across the West Bank, with Israeli forces conducting near-daily raids and mass arrests.

According to the new report, most of the journalists arrested were held under administrative detention – a practice where Israeli authorities hold detainees without charge or trial for up to six months. The detention can be extended based on “secret evidence” that neither the detainees nor their lawyers are allowed to see.

Due to the lack of information on the reason behind the jailing, the CPJ said it has been difficult to establish why the 17 journalists had been arrested. Several of the reporters’ families said they believe they were jailed for messages posted on social media, the report said.

The CPJ’s list is a snapshot of people incarcerated on December 1, and it does not include those imprisoned or released throughout the year. As of January 17, at least 19 reporters were still in jail, the CPJ said.

The Gaza war has also seen a spike in the number of journalists killed in the region. As of mid-January, 83 reporters have been killed since the start of the conflict. At least 67 were Palestinians, four were Israeli and three were Lebanese, according to the CPJ.

Since the start of 2024, the committee recorded that at least six journalists were killed, including Hamza Dahdouh, the eldest son of Al Jazeera’s Gaza bureau chief Wael Dahdouh. He was the fourth member of Dahdouh’s close family to have been killed in the war.

The report found that 320 journalists were in prison worldwide on December 1 of last year, the second-highest number recorded since the committee began documenting arrests in 1992. The total marks a fall from a record global high in 2022 when more than 360 reporters were behind bars.

This represents “a disturbing barometer of entrenched authoritarianism and the vitriol of governments determined to smother independent voices,” read the report.

“Some governments go a step further, using transnational repression to threaten and harass reporters beyond their own borders,” it added.



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